

Venezuela and the ALBA: Counter-hegemonic regionalism and higher education for all

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Abstract

This paper employs new regionalism theory and regulatory regionalism theory in its analysis and theorisation of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) as a counter-hegemonic Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) regionalism. As (initially) the regionalisation of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution, ALBA is centred around the idea of a 21st Century Socialism that replaces the 'competitive advantage' with the 'cooperative advantage'. ALBA, as a set of multi-dimensional inter- and transnational processes, operates within and across a range of sectors and scales whilst the structural transformations are driven by the interplay of state and non-state actors. The Venezuelan government's Higher Education For All (HEFA) policy, which is being regionalised within an emergent ALBA education space, assumes a key role in the direct democratic and participatory democratic processes upon which a bottom-up construction of counter-hegemony depends. HEFA challenges the globalised neoliberal higher education agenda of commoditisation, privatisation and elitism. Rather than producing enterprising subjects fashioned for global capitalism, HEFA seeks to form subjectivities along the moral values of solidarity and cooperation.

Key terms: Globalisation – Regionalism – Counter-hegemony – Higher education.

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Introduction¹

The Final Declaration of the 3rd Extraordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America–Peoples' Trade Agreement (ALBA-PTA), issued on 26 November 2008 in response to the global economic crisis, can be viewed as a landmark document in the construction of

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a counter-hegemonic Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) regionalism, whose ambitious agenda bears the potential for global transformation. According to the Declaration, the representatives of the ALBA-PTA member states...

...reiterated their firm conviction that the regional is the privileged space to give immediate and effective responses [to the crisis of global capitalism] and formulated concrete proposals to construct an ALBA economic and monetary zone that protects our countries from the depredation of transnational capital [...] through the establishment of the SUCRE Common Currency Unit and a Chamber of Payment Compensation. The creation of this Monetary Zone is accompanied by the establishment of a Reserves Stability Fund. [...] To study the creation of a World Monetary Council that would coordinate monetary agreements between regional blocs and whose principal functions would be international monetary, financial and banking regulation and the creation of a world currency to guarantee transparency and stability in capital flows, and the provision of resources for development. (ALBA, 2008a)

Within a neo-Gramscian approach, as represented by Robert Cox and Stephen Gill (Cox, 1996; Gill, 2008), I identify ALBA as a counter-hegemonic globalisation project that in both geo-political and ideational terms extends beyond the LAC area. ALBA originated in the resistance to the United States (US) promoted Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and is centred around the ideas of endogenous development and a '21st Century Socialism' that replace the competitive advantage with the *cooperative* advantage (MICE/BANCOEX, n.d.). As (initially) the regionalisation of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution, ALBA has evolved from the 2000 Cuba-Venezuela Integral Cooperation Agreement and was formalised by the 2004 ALBA Integration Agreement. Since then, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominica, Honduras, Ecuador, St. Vincent & The Grenadines, and Antigua & Barbuda have joined as full members. In 2006, ALBA was complemented by Bolivian President Morales' proposal of Peoples' Trade Agreements (PTAs), defined as a "fair trade" alternative to the US-promoted bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).²

The first section of the paper sketches out Venezuela's foreign policy principles and objectives, in which ALBA is anchored. Throughout the paper, it is useful to keep in mind the analytical distinction between formal states-led *regionalism*, which involves

2 The Castilian acronym ALBA means 'dawn'. It counter-poses ALCA, the abbreviation of Area de Libre Comercio para las Américas, FTAA. President Chávez first coined the term at the Association of Caribbean States Summit in December 2001. 'ALBA' initially stood for Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, and has been reformulated as Bolivarian Alternative for Our America (January 2007), Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America (April 2007), and Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (June 2009).

the institutionalisation of patterns of relations, and social processes of *regionalisation* that reach beyond the *de jure* region into the *de facto* region (Phillips, 2003; Payne & Gamble, 1996). ALBA thus understood constitutes the only genuinely *regionalist* project in the construction of a LAC region. I use new regionalism theory (NRT) and regulatory regionalism theory (RRT) to illuminate the multi-dimensional inter- and transnational processes that operate within and across a range of sectors and scales whilst being driven by the interplay of state and non-state actors. The latter are collectively referred to as the 'organised society' which, as the counter-hegemonic concept to the liberal-bourgeois idea of a 'civil society' (commonly dominated by the wealthy and powerful), means popular, mass-based organisation and the collective exercise of power through councils and movements within anti- and non-capitalist social relations (see Muhr, 2008a: 28-29). The Venezuelan government's 'Higher Education For All' (HEFA) policy, which is being regionalised as part of a "geopolitics of the South", assumes a key role in the formation of the organised society upon which a bottom-up construction of counter-hegemony and the political and economic redefinition of LAC depends. HEFA rejects the globalised neoliberal higher education agenda of commoditisation, privatisation and elitism and reclaims education at all levels as a fundamental right. Rather than producing enterprising subjects fashioned for global capitalism, HEFA seeks to form subjectivities along the moral values of solidarity and cooperation. I illustrate this by reference to my case study from within the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV) as one of the key institutions that operationalise HEFA.

Bolivarian foreign policy

Venezuela's foreign policy agenda is enshrined in the 1999 Constitution, and in two successive national development plans (RBV, 2001a; 2007). The statutes oblige the government to pursue "Latin American and Caribbean integration" guided by the normative imperatives of "solidarity", "peaceful cooperation" between "equal states", "complementarity" and "social justice", in the form of a "community of nations" with a common foreign and defence policy, for "regional sovereignty", the "democratisation of the international society", and the construction of a "multi-polar" world order to achieve an "international equilibrium". Strategies include "reversing the traditional

concentration of power in the international organisations” through “concerted action by the developing countries”; redefining the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR); and the international promotion of “participatory democracy”.

Put into perspective, the Venezuelan development agenda essentially accords with the principles expressed in a range of United Nations declarations, above all the 1974 Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO), the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development (UNDRD) (OHCHR, 1986, Articles 3, 4, 7), and the 2002 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Draft Guidelines on a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies (UNHCHR, 2002, see Articles 220, 249). Important to note is that Venezuela distinguishes between South-South cooperation on the one hand, and the diversification of international relations, on the other. The former is governed by solidarity in the ALBA spirit within LAC and such countries as Mali, Malawi, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The latter is of a pragmatic (technology transfer, trade) and geo-strategic nature, underscored by “common anti-imperialist interests”, and includes Argentina, Brazil, Russia, Iran, China and Belorussia. Strategic alliances in Europe have been established with Spain and Portugal, and to some extent with France, Italy and Bulgaria (RBV, 2007: 48-9).

The foreign policy agenda has involved the strategic weakening of the existing neoliberal so-called ‘open regionalisms’. In 2006, Venezuela left both the Group of Three (G-3), formalised between Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela in 1995, and the Andean Community (CAN), formerly known as the Andean Pact (1969-1997) between Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. A complete breakdown of CAN is possible due to the division between Bolivia and Ecuador on the one hand, and Colombia and Peru on the other, over the issues of free trade agreements with the US and the European Union (EU), as well as over security and counter-insurgency. While the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) appears to be at a point of stagnation, MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay) is in the process of enlargement as Venezuela joined on 4 July 2006. Although the ratification of Venezuela’s full membership by the Brazilian Senate and the Paraguayan parliament is pending, Venezuela’s Adherence Protocol already suggests redefinition in some respects, for instance by granting differential treatment to the smaller economies (Uruguay, Paraguay) and through the promotion of a social agenda.

ALBA: projects, processes, politics

Commonly, ALBA is portrayed as simply a multi-state bloc of (currently) nine members (Antigua and Barbuda, Cuba, Bolivia, Dominica, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Venezuela). However, the benefit of a critical globalisation theory approach consists in transcending methodological nationalism by analysing the conjunction of projects, processes and politics at work and to show how these are being mobilised through the strategic use of scale. The ALBA integration initiative employs five mechanisms through which the entire LAC are integrated: a) *regionalist* inter-state agreements; b) *bi-national* instruments between Venezuela and almost all LAC states, especially Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay; c) *multi-national* agreements between any three or more states in the region; d) *sub-regional* agreements among three or more states belonging to the Caribbean, Andean, or Amazon/Southern Cone sub-regions; and e) *transnational* mechanisms which, as I show in a case study of Nicaragua (Muhr, 2008b), transcend international relations by bypassing (adversary) national governments. The co-existence of these mechanisms makes ALBA a counter-hegemonic globalisation project that competes with capitalist globalisation across the global, regional, national and a range of sub-national/local scales. These can be federal states, mayoralties, and the various forms of the organised society, above all social and popular movements, community and workers councils, cooperatives, and state-worker-managed recuperated factories in, for instance, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

ALBA operates across multiple, inter-dependent and complementary dimensions, which I categorize as the *politico-ideological, cultural, energy, social, economic-industrial, environmental, military, financial, and education and knowledge*. Energy integration through PETROAMERICA is the major tool that facilitates ALBA. The regional energy policies comprise oil and its derivatives, gas, electricity, as well as the development of alternative and renewable energies. PETROAMERICA is composed of the three sub-regional blocs PETROCARIBE, PETROANDINA and PETROSUR, which geo-politically correspond (and compete) with CARICOM, CAN, and MERCOSUR, respectively. PETROAMERICA most aptly illustrates that ALBA and UNASUR are in fact overlapping projects. PETROCARIBE, with currently 18

members, is the most advanced of the three sub-regionalisms. While Venezuela's supply of oil and derivatives to the member states increased from 59 thousand barrels per day (bpd) in 2007 to 161.8 thousand bpd in June 2009, over USD 24.5 thousand million were invested in energy infrastructure in the sub-region over that period, through which almost 60 thousand direct and indirect jobs were created (Ramírez, 2009; PETROCARIBE, 2009a). Savings accrue to the partner states from a low interest rate, deferred payments scheme, as well as from the elimination of intermediaries along the value chain as participation is restricted to state companies that are created with PETROCARIBE assistance where no adequate state infrastructure exists (see Muhr, 2008b: 343, for details). Venezuelan Minister of Energy and Oil Ramírez states that out of USD 6.9 thousand million of PETROCARIBE oil supply by June 2009, USD 1.4 thousand million were tangible savings to the partners, and 2.9 thousand million deferred payments (Ramírez, 2009). In principle similar to EU structural convergence funds, the deferred payments are re-distributed via regional development funds, such as the *ALBA Caribe Fund*. Through the latter alone, 84 development projects in 11 member states have been financed, from which over 15.4 million people (one in three inhabitants) have benefitted (PDVSA, 2008; PETROCARIBE, 2009b).

Organisationally, ALBA consists of the *Council of Presidents*, the *Council of Ministers/Chancellors*, the *Social Movements Council*, a permanent Executive Secretary, and a range of international commissions, working groups and initiatives in accordance with the different dimensions. Of relevance to my discussion of Higher Education For All (HEFA) below is the Social Movements Council, which serves to integrate LAC's organised societies in the bottom-up construction of ALBA and for direct popular democratic participation in regional governance. Actors may include national, inter- and transnational popular, indigenous and other social movements as well as the emergent worker, student and community council structure in the entire region and beyond. According to the *General Manifesto* of the 1st Summit of the ALBA Social Movements Council (Bolivia, October 2009), national social movement coordinations in each ALBA member state will mediate between local movements and

the Council. Social organisations in non-ALBA countries may integrate transnationally to “globalise the struggle” (ALBA 2009d).³

Theorising ALBA

New Regionalism Theory, as developed by Björn Hettne, argues that regions are socially constructed and constantly “in the making”, through processes of regionalisation that transform a geographical area into an active subject (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000: 461). Regional coherence and community is defined by five “levels of regionness”:

1. *Regional space*: a region is rooted in territorially bounded space (a geographical unit).
2. *Regional complex*: progressively widening trans-local social relations based on historically derived identities, nevertheless constrained by the nation state system.
3. *Regional society*: a multi-dimensional, rule-based pattern of relations (organised cooperation) in an interplay of state and non-state actors (inter- and/or transnational society). The various dimensions occur at different spatial levels, and the relationships differ in time and space. In these processes, the relationships between the *de jure* (formal) region (the full members) and the *real region* (the *de facto* regionalisation) deepen and widen, in which formal organisations and social institutions play a crucial role.
4. *Regional community*: the region becomes an active subject with a distinct identity, which includes the convergence of national interests and the compatibility of ideas, organisations, and processes, conflict resolution by non-violent means, a trans-nationalised regional society, social equality mechanisms, and social learning to construct a regional collective culture and identity created by common fundamental values.
5. *Region state*: a political entity grounded in fundamental values, and cultural and ethnic heterogeneity (plurality). A forced standardisation, as in the former Soviet Union, is not viable.

ALBA’s *regional space* is defined by shared territoriality, i.e. the geographical boundaries of Central America, South America and the Caribbean, and by the people’s historical and cultural roots, their common interests, needs and potentialities (MICE/BANCOEX, n.d.). As regards the other levels, ALBA confirms Hettne and

³ Over 700 delegates from social movements and indigenous communities, alongside representatives from over 40 African, Asian and European countries reportedly participated in the 1st Summit of the ALBA Social Movements Council (http://www.movimientos.org/noalca/albasi/show_text.php3?key=16022).

Söderbaum in that despite a certain evolutionary logic, these should not be understood as a series of stages (2000: 470), as in ALBA the different levels are occurring simultaneously. Importantly, in contrast to existing (sub-)regionalisms, such as the EU, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and MERCOSUR, in which the social dimension (“welfare”) is either non-existent or only enters at the fourth or fifth level of regionness (Hettne, 2003), in ALBA the social has assumed a key integrationist role from the outset. Examples include the inter- and transnationalised *Yo Sí Puedo* literacy campaign, the *Misión Milagro* free-of-charge ophthalmology programme, from which 1,54 million people in the 33 LAC countries benefited between 2005 and early 2009⁴, and the *ALBA Caribe Fund*. The social, however, is not only a normative end in itself, but a means to equalise the geographies of uneven development which, as Hettne (2003: 361) suggests, is indispensable in the long-term transition from a community to a union of nations and, ultimately, to something like a region state.

Before examining some of the dynamics involved in building ALBA’s *regional society*, it is useful to complement Hettne’s constructivist approach, with its emphasis on ideational forces and social norms in the constitution of the very notion of a region (Jayasuriya, 2003a: 200), with a regional governance framework, as proposed by Kanishka Jayasuriya. To Jayasuriya...

...[r]egional strategies need to be analysed and understood as strategies of economic and political governance, driven by fundamental restructuring of economic processes along regional lines. Regional governance is not an agglomeration of ‘national economic units’ at a higher regional level; it is a more fundamental regionalisation of economic activity” (Jayasuriya, 2008: 9).

Regulatory regionalism argues that regionalised governance does not occur at a spatial scale above the national, but that the regional structures are rooted in the national. Although the ALBA states appear more interventionist than regulatory, where currently government prevails over governance (the state as a shaper of the institutional context of regulatory institutions, rather than regulating directly), regulatory regionalism provides an understanding of the state ‘extending out’ beyond its territorial boundaries in the processes of regionalisation. That is, “the ‘regional’

4 See: <http://www.cubacoop.com/cubacoop/misionmilagros.htm>, last accessed 16 October 2009.

becomes incorporated within the political space of the state” (Jayasuriya, 2003a: 205, 213; 2008). Jayasuriya identifies four key elements in such a system of multi-scalar regional governance:

1. A stable set of international economic strategies (open regionalism vs bloc regionalism).
2. A distinctive set of governance structures which enables regional economic governance (rules-based vs informal governance structures).
3. A set of normative or ideational constructs that define the region (regional identity) and make possible a given set of regional governance structures.
4. A convergence of domestic coalitions and political economy structures across the region, which facilitates the coherent construction of regional political projects. (Jayasuriya, 2003b: 340).

ALBA is an explicitly political economic and geo-strategic project between “states that share the same vision of the exercise of national and regional sovereignty” (RBV, 2008: 2-3). At its heart is the regionalisation of Venezuela’s endogenous development, which is a needs-based social and popular economy in which people come before profit, and where ‘from within’ captures the idea of the community transcending the local towards the national, regional and global (MINCI, 2008: 4). This process is contained in the above-stated foreign policy objective of internationalising participatory democracy whilst constructing the transnational organised society. While the rules-based regional market, defined as a “fair trade zone”, is expanding, currently ALBA may be viewed as a form of ‘developmental regionalism’, in which an interventionist and policy coordinating mode of governance does not mean a de-linking from the global economy (cf Hettne, 2003: 363). Whether the initiative will, or can, be developed into a block regionalism, such as the EU, may depend on the extent to which the differences in economic development can be levelled out (cf Jayasuriya, 2003b: 341) and how the apparent competition between the open regionalisms and ALBA will play out. However, the supranational jurisdiction or regulatory framework and corresponding institutions associated with the common currency to be launched in 2010 would suggest the emergence of some form of block regionalism in the future. This may further be supported by the incrementing congruences among various member states’ national legal infrastructure, currently with respect to outlawing neoliberalism (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador) and perhaps capitalism per se (e.g. Venezuelan anti-speculation laws), legal democratic norms (the promotion of

direct democracy and participatory democracy)⁵, and the creation of an ALBA educational space since 2009.

Crucial to understanding the significance of ALBA as a counter-hegemonic regional integration project, and as the arguably only viable LAC regionalist strategy, is the role of ideational or normative constructs. Both new and regulatory regionalism theory coincide in ascribing utmost relevance to the development of a regional identity. This element is largely, or completely, absent in the neoliberal sub-regionalisms. It is this dimension where in ALBA a counter-hegemonic ethics of solidarity and cooperation merges with the historico-ideological in the construction of a *regional complex* and a *regional community* (that include both the *de jure* and *de facto* regions). It also provides a foundation for regional governance. The ample reference made to an array of anti-colonialist/imperialist *guerrilleros* and liberators in the ALBA discourse points to the attempt to construct a regional, popular-revolutionary consciousness and identity (a 'culture of resistance') based on what Hettne and Söderbaum identify as a "collective memory" and a "shared cultural tradition" to counteract the historical monopolisation of external relations ("who is friend or foe") by the countries' national elites (2000: 463, 467).

Historico-ideologically, ALBA builds on Simón Bolívar's vision of a "Grand Homeland" [*Patria Grande*], which was also taken up by Cuban José Martí and Nicaraguan Augusto César Sandino. Like the Venezuelan government today, Bolívar viewed a "world balance of power" (multi-polarity) inextricably related to LAC independence, which itself would have to be a collective effort. Notions of the *Patria Grande* range in Bolívar's work from a "single national body" with "central government" to a "league", "federation" and "union" of American states. In recent years, the idea of a 'grand-national' [*grannacional*] has literally been adopted in bilateral declarations (e.g. Brazil, February 2005) and, most importantly, in the Political Declaration of the 5th ALBA Summit (Venezuela, April 2007). There, the objective of "constructing the Grand Homeland" was translated into strategy as bi- and multi-state-owned *grand-national projects* (GNPs) and *grand-national companies* (GNCs). As a historical, geopolitical, ideological and socio-economic concept, they are the counter-

5 See Muhr (2008a) for a theorisation of Venezuela's model of democracy that complements representative democracy with Marxist-rooted direct democracy and rights-based participatory democracy. In the case of Honduras, the attempt to introduce such mechanisms provoked the 28 June 2009 coup d'état by sectors of the oligarchy and the military.

hegemonic responses to capitalist multi- and transnational corporations (MNCs/TNCs). In accordance with the above-stated endogenous development rationale, GNPs and GNCs may operate within and across all ALBA dimensions, and transcend the national to “confront the global through a strengthening of the local capacities by amalgamating them” (ALBA, 2008b). GNCs’ productive dynamics are oriented towards the production of use value, i.e. goods and services that satisfy basic human needs. They may link up with private enterprises at the service of ALBA, and may develop activities outside the *de jure* region in non-constituent ALBA countries (ALBA, 2008b).

In late 2009, 15 GNCs were in the process of planning, ratification and/or construction. The first two GNCs – *GNC-Energy* and *PETROALBA* – were established in April 2007. In 2008, the *GNP Literacy and Post-Literacy* and the *GNP ALBA-Education* were ratified (ALBA, 2008c). Subsequently, at the 1st Meeting of the ALBA Education Ministers on Isla Margarita, Venezuela, on 12-13 March 2009, the need for an “integral transformation of Initial, Basic, Medium and Higher Education in the ALBA countries” was articulated (ALBA, 2009a). This was followed by the *Agreement on the Recognition of Higher Education Titles or Diplomas*, signed at the 6th Extraordinary ALBA Summit in Maracay, Venezuela, on 24 June 2009 (ALBA, 2009b), and the 2nd ALBA Education Workshop in Managua, Nicaragua, 24-26 June 2009 (ALBA 2009c). Via the stated declarations and agreements, Venezuela’s ‘Higher Education For All’ (HEFA) rationale has been regionalised, according to which “any *bachiller*⁶ who *wants* to enter and/or continue tertiary level studies is legally entitled and actively supported to doing so” (Muhr, 2008a: 91). This requires a holistic approach to higher education, which means that the conditions for the inclusion of those historically excluded from higher education have to be created at the pre-tertiary levels. Therefore, by reference to the “democratisation and universalisation of higher education” (ALBA, 2009b: 1), HEFA reclaims education at *all* levels as a “public social good, fundamental human right and undeniable duty of the state” (ALBA, 2009c: 6). As the Managua Declaration asserts, “we firmly reject the forces that from the imperial North drive the commoditisation of higher education” (ALBA, 2009c: 6). The strategic relevance of HEFA and the two education GNPs within a “geopolitics of the South” (MPPES, 2009a: 8) may thus be summed up as the pursuit of the complementary and solidararian

6 Bachiller is the holder of the bachillerato, the qualification required to enter tertiary education.

integration of the national education systems in order to confront the expansion of the mercantilist (US/EU) higher education agendas and the educative and cultural imperialism and dependency associated with them. HEFA thus is at the service of the social, cultural, economic and political transformation of the national and regional societies in the construction of the “grand-national union” and the “grand-national conscience” (ALBA, 2009b).

This is not merely rhetoric. Within their short period of existence, the education GNPs have produced impressive results. Since 2008, three ALBA countries (Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua) have been declared illiteracy-free. In Honduras, which was expected to follow in December 2009, the process has been halted due to the military-elite coup d'état of 28 June 2009, while Dominica is scheduled to reach the objective in 2011. As the Cuban *Yo Sí Puedo* (I Can Do It!) literacy method has been adapted to 14 different linguistic and cultural contexts, and is used in 28 countries worldwide⁷, 3.8 million people benefited in over 20 LAC countries by 2009. Moreover, the GNP *Literacy and Post-Literacy* pursues universal primary education and “integral post-literacy”, which conceptually includes secondary and higher education “for all throughout the entire life”, whilst ‘integral’ means linking theory with practice.⁸

A key policy of the GNP *ALBA-Education* is the creation of under- and post-graduate as well as doctorate programmes in medicine, education, and oil geopolitics. Institutions in charge of these programmes will be the University of the Peoples of ALBA (UNIALBA) and the National Experimental University of the Peoples of the South (UNISUR), which were formalised via Resolution 3.722 of 22 July 2009 (RBV, 2009: 7-8). They can be imagined as regional and global networks of universities and research centres. While UNIALBA will be organised around a satellite structure with at least one ‘nodal’ university in each ALBA country and the headquarters in one of them, UNISUR will initially rely on Venezuela’s existing higher education infrastructure, especially *Misión Alma Mater*, which was formalised in March 2009. The mission consists in the progressive transformation of 29 state-financed university institutes and colleges into national experimental universities, as well as the creation of 17 territorial universities (linked to the productive, social and cultural needs and vocations of determined territorial spaces), ten specialised universities and two education institutes. *Alma*

7 See: <http://www.cubacoop.com/cubacoop/yosipuedo.htm>, last accessed 16 October 2009.

8 Quotes are from Managua Declaration background documentation, obtained from MPPES, 03 September 2009.

Mater institutions that have opened since 2006 include the Latin American Agroecological Institute Paulo Freire (IALA) and the Latin American School of Medicine of Venezuela (ELAM), amongst others.

Key elements in the emergent HEFA governance regime are the development of the common ALBA basic and medium education curriculum, a set of own ALBA quality indicators, and the mutual recognition of titles or diplomas awarded by ALBA programmes, from which close to 14.000 ALBA higher education students benefited in 2009. As the refinement and implementation of these policies is ongoing at the time of writing, it is difficult to draw definite conclusions. However, in accordance with regulatory regionalism theory, it may be possible to speak of the state 'reaching out' as currently the integration of the national education systems is negotiated between the respective education and higher education ministries at the international rather than at an independent supranational level, through international commissions such as the *High Level Commission of ALBA Education Authorities* and the *Commission for Registration and Monitoring*, the latter being in charge of the recognition of titles and diplomas. The network of national universities that will compose UNIALBA and UNISUR supports the notion of states extending out, as do the inter-state GNCs and GNPs in their construction of the regional counter-hegemonic political economy structure. However, the *Agreement on the Recognition of Higher Education Titles or Diplomas* may be viewed as a first step towards a supranational legal infrastructure, as Article 14 of the Agreement obliges the member governments to modify their national legislations accordingly (ALBA, 2009b).

Of greater interest for the remainder of this paper are the sub-national levels of the HEFA governance structure and of the emergent regional governance regime generally. It is important to recognise that the ALBA policies are not in a unilinear fashion deterritorialised from the Venezuelan state to the inter- and/or supranational in order to be reterritorialised by the respective member states. Rather, the matrix is much more complex and involves multi-directional and multi-scalar processes and a variety of actors at different levels, especially non-state actors at the grassroots. Whilst policies may be upscaled to inter- or perhaps supranational fora through the national governments, they are also directly transnationalised by the sub-national actors in what may be termed an emergent 'transnational organised society'. As regards the former, the creation of the common ALBA curriculum provides an apt example of how perhaps

to imagine these processes. The creation of the ALBA education GNPs between 2007 and 2009 was in Nicaragua paralleled by the transformation of the national curriculum in 2007-2008, through a national consultancy in which over 17 thousand Nicaraguans from within and without the education system in the entire territory participated (teachers, head teachers, parents, non-government organisations, teacher unions, community leaders, etc.) (FEDH-IPN et al, 2007; MINED, 2008). Fundamental curricular norms generated by the consultancy, such as the concept of 'integral education' for local socio-productive development, have been integrated in the Nicaraguan education policy (GRUN, 2008: 118-27; MINED, 2009), and appear also in the 2009 ALBA Managua Declaration background documentation that lays out the policy implementation strategy.⁹ In return, the ALBA concept of the grand-national (*patria grande*), for instance, has been territorialized through Nicaragua's National Human Development Plan 2008-2012 (GRUN, 2008: 5, 16, 44).

With respect to the transnationalisation of policies (bypassing the national), it is useful to draw an analogy to capitalist globalisation and regionalisation. While the hegemonic processes are driven by the capitalist state and capitalist private actors (MNCs/TNCs and other inter-, supra and transnational actors and organisations), the Bolivarian counter-project is constructed jointly by 'states-in-revolution' and non- or anti-capitalist social forces, i.e. the national and transnational organised societies. As Nicola Phillips' (2003) analysis of MERCOSUR shows, non-state actors (i.e. domestic and transnational corporations) have constructed a regional economic space that reaches beyond the formal sub-regional territoriality (the *de jure* region) into the *de facto* region. In ALBA, however, the line between state and non-state actors is not that clear-cut as both states and non-state actors operate through sets of political, economic, cultural and social processes that overlap and reach beyond the *de jure* into the *de facto* region, i.e. the entire LAC. The significance of the transnational ALBA strategy lies in the contestation over spaces (their production and reconstruction) dominated by capitalist social relations, especially in countries that are not formal members of ALBA. It is on those grounds that Haiman El Troudi and Juan Carlos Monedero refer to the recuperated factories and other social production companies of the counter-

⁹ Clearly, more systematic research would be necessary to consolidate this argument. For instance, the stated concept ('integral education') may equally have emerged from a different national policy. The purpose of the example is to illustrate possible governance processes and mechanisms more generally.

hegemonic political economy as “socialist beachheads” (Troudi & Monedero, 2007: 179).

The two pillars of regional and global counter-hegemony – the ‘state-in-revolution’ and the ‘transnational organised society’ – are inter-dependent and mutually reinforcing. It is the state that promotes popular organisation in the construction of direct democracy and participatory democracy. Government by the interventionist ‘state-in-revolution’ may be viewed as being complemented by a ‘transnational revolutionary governance system’. It is with respect to the latter, the construction of the organised society, upon which counter-hegemony depends and where HEFA assumes a key role. The following and final section illustrates this relationship within the Venezuelan context.

HEFA: constructing the organised society

Venezuela’s Bolivarian constitution of 1999 guarantees “permanent integral quality education” as a human right, an essential root of democracy, and a “public service” for whose provision the state assumes primary responsibility at all levels and in all its forms. In order to ensure equal opportunities, education is obligatory from the nursery to the medium diversified level (age 18). Free-of-charge public (state) education includes the undergraduate tertiary level (CBRV, 2000, Articles 102, 103). HEFA, however, also means higher education being at the service of the entire society, rather than simply being a means of individual social mobility. This refers to the political, economic, social, cultural and ethical role of education in local, national and regional endogenous development and the construction of 21st Century Socialism. Technical knowledge and skills are as important as creating political subjects and what Antonio Gramsci called ‘organic intellectuals’ in the democratic transition to socialism.

Three dimensions can be identified in the HEFA policy: the philosophical (a ‘new socialist ethics’), the quantitative (‘access for all’), and the qualitative (‘social relevance’). Grounded in the social and popular education philosophy of Simón Rodríguez, who once was Bolívar’s educator, the Bolivarian philosophy rejects the reduction of education and knowledge to skills and competences to ‘function’ in the capitalist economy, and instead views life as a holistic experience that includes lived and felt needs, expectations and aspirations (Leal, 2006: 10). To achieve the “ethical

and moral re-foundation” of the nation, intrinsic motivation and non-capitalist humanist values, principles and incentives fuse with Bolívar’s thinking, where social justice, equity and solidarity are envisioned to reign the relations between individuals and state institutions, with the ultimate objective of the “greatest happiness for each citizen” (RBV, 2007: 7; Troudi & Monedero, 2007). The government’s premise of “morality and enlightenment”, adopted from Bolívar, requires both formal and popular education, for ethical and cultural growth with knowledge-production in all locations, from the street and the field to the classroom (MINCI, 2007). This strongly resembles Ivan Illich’s ideas as expressed in his “deschooling society” or “deschooling education”, by which Illich meant a separation of learning from the social control as exercised by the educational apparatus, and turning “all of life” into an “educational experience” so that “education for all” would become “education by all” (Illich, 1973[1971]).

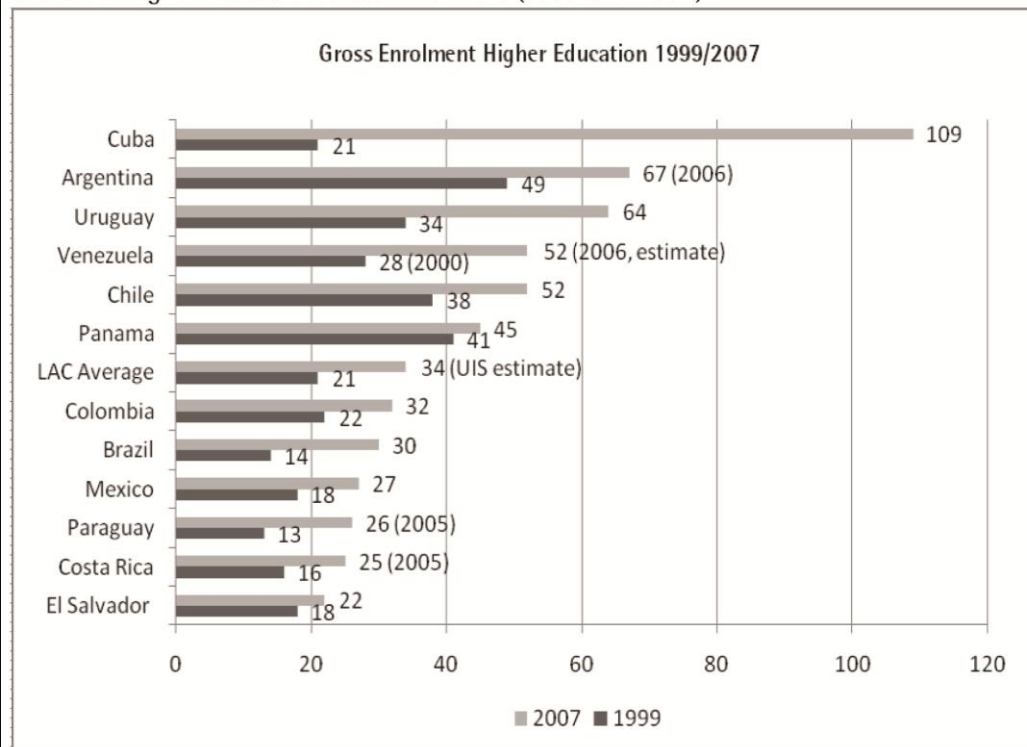
The constitutionally postulated holistic and integral approach to equal educational opportunities is supported by a range of universally accessible social justice mechanisms called ‘missions’, that aim to even out the historical social and geographical inequalities by combining immediate poverty alleviation with long-term structural transformation. By 2009, 27 missions were operating in a complementary fashion across strategic socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-political sectors, such as health, food, housing, environment, gender and indigenous rights (Muhr, 2008a). *Misión Sucre* and the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV) were – until 2008 – the principal institutions to operationalise the HEFA policy through the municipalisation of higher education. Over the years, 1.915 UBV/*Misión Sucre* education spaces have been created in all 335 Venezuelan municipalities, including prisons, factories and military garrisons. While in 1998, 28 in one thousand Venezuelans studied in higher education, this figure was raised to 81 by 2008 (MPPES, 2009b). Table 3 depicts the massification of higher education in Venezuela over the past decade, whilst also drawing attention to the significant reversal of the privatisation trend under neoliberalism in the 1990s.

Table 1 Venezuela: Higher Education Enrolment (1989-2008)

Type of Institution	1989		1998		2008	
State	394.198	73%	377.107	56%	1.673.963	74%
Private	148.038	27%	291.002	44%	586.258	26%
Total (State + Private)	542.236	100%	668.109	100%	2.260.221	100%

Source: Generated from MPPES (2009b: 3-5)

Chart 1: Higher Education Gross Enrolment (1999 and 2007)



Source: Produced from UIS (2009, p. 130-132; 136)

According to the Institute of Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UIS), Venezuela is among the countries that have most substantially expanded higher education gross enrolment in the LAC region since the late 1990s (Figure 1).¹⁰ The Venezuelan government's estimate of 52% gross enrolment in 2006 (Figure 1) is also stated by the World Bank for that year (World Bank, 2009). In 2009, however, the Venezuelan Ministry of Higher Education (MPPEs, *Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Educación Superior*) states higher education gross enrolment at 83% (MPPEs, 2009b: 9). Provided this figure is reliable, Venezuela may now claim position two in LAC, following Cuba, and possibly range before countries such as Norway, Australia and the United Kingdom, depending on those countries' growth rates since 2007 (see UIS, 2009: 128-36).

UBV and *Misión Sucre*, however, did not break as radically with the social reproduction of the hegemonic regime as necessary for the envisioned social

¹⁰ Gross enrolment ratio (GER) is "the number of pupils or students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the theoretical age group for the same level of education. For the tertiary level, the population used is the 5-year age group following on from the secondary school leaving age" (UIS, 2009: 255). Venezuela's Ministry of Higher Education adopts this definition, which means that GER in Venezuela refers to the 18-22 year age group (MPPEs, 2009b: 10).

transformations. In response, with the revolution entering a new, radicalised phase in 2007, which was marked by the National Development Plan 2007-2013 (RBV, 2007), *Misión Alma Mater* was launched as the new institutionality to further drive the “socialisation of knowledge” (MPPEs, 2008). Nevertheless, the UBV curriculum on its part contains a truly revolutionary element related to the concept of ‘quality’. In both Venezuela and the emergent ALBA education space the positivist notion of quality as quantifiable standards is complemented by “political quality”, which refers to the “social relevance” of higher education. The concept of ‘social relevance’ combines a) scientific-academic and technical-professional capacities for the social popular economy and endogenous development, i.e. “research strictly associated with the solution of local and regional problems”; and b) for “social development in the local”, for exercising direct and participatory democracy and the creation of “popular power” (RBV, 2001a: 93; UBV, 2004: 17, 60). Therefore, as a “community that creates community”, as the UBV mission statement proclaims, UBV’s “politics of knowledge” conceives of a reciprocity between knowledge and social responsibility, expertise and citizenship, the private and the public, which requires a “totality of knowledge” – scientific, technological and humanist knowledges (UBV, 2004: 8-18). As the praxis of social relevance, and within the rationale of a (partially) open curriculum, all of UBV’s transdisciplinary study programmes have at their core a two-hour-per-week research theory and methodology class complemented by about four weekly hours of formative research and social insertion for collective knowledge construction in the communities (UBV, 2005). Methodologically, over the four to five year study period, the research training develops from initially quantitative survey through qualitative techniques to participatory action research (PAR). PAR is philosophically grounded in the objective of people’s conscientisation and empowerment in order to become subjects in, and transformers of, their reality, as theorised in Paulo Freire’s action-reflection-action cycle and Jürgen Habermas’ emancipatory knowledge.

Between 2006 and 2009, I conducted an ethnographic case study of the UBV-PAR in *Barrio Cruz Verde*, in the municipality of Miranda in North-Western Venezuela. My participation in the UBV community for seven months in 2006 and two follow-up visits of several weeks each in 2007 and 2009, enabled me to witness the bottom-up construction of the revolution in a historically non-organised environment (see Muhr, 2008, for details). The experience demonstrates the potential of the UBV-PAR for

mobilisation, organisation and transformative knowledge creation in the community. In this case, the UBV-PAR culminated in an act of popular power through which the community appropriated an abandoned building non-violently in the collective interest and for communal use. In the process, the UBV students' work was crucial in two respects: while the PAR generated consciousness and action, the law students accompanied the community as advisors, thus exercising a form of citizenship that UBV associates with the objective of forming "community lawyers". That is, lawyers who defend the popular interests against the "oligarchic sectors", as one student put it. The role of the UBV-PAR, and HEFA generally, however, transcends immediate action and is of a much more strategic and long-term significance to the formation of the organised society and the transformation of the geographies of power towards the envisaged 'community state', which depends on a functioning council structure. In *Barrio Cruz Verde*, the community leaders view the collective squatting as an important step in furthering subsequent popular organisation, which has included the formation of five community councils since 2008.

Conclusion

As the democratisation of higher education, HEFA rejects the commoditisation of education and the production of an entrepreneurial-competitive global elite, alongside the hegemonic, instrumentalist notion of 'lifelong learning' as specialisation for the capitalist economy (see, for instance, World Bank, 2003; Brine, 2006; Robertson, 2008). Instead, promoting "integral education throughout the entire life" (UBV, 2004: 67-68) seeks to foster "human talent" (UBV, 2004: 177) – rather than 'human capital' – at the service of society, or the collectivity, for revolutionary social transformation. This agenda underlies the grandnational HEFA policy which will, as the respective background documentation from August 2009 states, "develop programmes of research and social linkage at the service of local endogenous development and articulated with the ALBA grandnational politics, projects and companies". Linking education with the community will seek to increase political as well as socio-productive organisation to overcome exclusion and to "promote networks of social organisation for the union of the peoples of the South" (MPPEs, 2009a: 13).

HEFA thus may be viewed as promoting a re-scaling of power from the (bourgeois) state and private national and transnational capitalist sectors to the sub-national,

organised societies. In this process, the organised communities in their different forms become counter-hegemonic 'sites of power' in both the *de jure* and the *de facto* regions (e.g. social production companies, literacy points, recuperated factories, councils, GNPs, GNCs). Simultaneously, the transnational processes in ALBA suggest an upscaling of power from the local to the regional and ultimately the global. The reconstruction of scalar structurations of social space (see Swyngedouw, 1997: 156-57; Brenner, 2004: 57), which I may call a 'counter-hegemonic democratic politics of scale', imply the construction of a transnational revolutionary space, which is becoming formalised or institutionalised as the ALBA Social Movements Council. As stated, it is above all in the Social Movements Council where LAC's local and national organised societies are becoming inter- and transnationally integrated for concerted collective action in the de- and reconstruction of the hegemonic structures. The precise form that this multi-scalar, bottom-up construction of counter-hegemony may take, however, will ultimately depend on how the major two pillars, or forces of ALBA – the interventionist 'states-in-revolution' and the 'transnational organised society' – will play out against each other in the emergent multi-scalar regional governance regime.

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